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USSR MAY BE PURSUING NEW POLICY TOWARD BALKAN PACT POWERS

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There are indications that the USSR may be adopting a more conciliatory policy toward the three states of the Balkan alliance. The bankruptcy of Moscow's past policy of hostility and pressure has become increasingly evident in view of the USSR's failure to gain a strong position in the Turkish straits, the defection of Tito followed by successful Yugoslav rapprochement with the West, and the Communist defeat in the Greek Civil War.

The Soviet "declaration" to Turkey on 31 May, renouncing territorial claims against Turkey and expressing optimism on the possibility of finding a mutually acceptable solution for the straits question, was a sharp departure from Moscow's policy toward Turkey at the end of World War II. At this time the Kremlin renounced the Soviet-Turkish treaty, made extensive territorial demands in northeastern Turkey, and insisted that the USSR share in the defense of the straits through a bilateral agreement.

Turkey rejected Soviet territorial claims, and, supported by the US and Great Britain, refused to consider a bilateral agreement on the straits excluding other powers concerned in preserving their international character. Moscow continued to hold, however, that only riparian Black Sea powers, specifically, Turkey, the USSR, Bulgaria and Rumania, should participate in any conference settling the straits regime.

Relations between Moscow and Ankara further deteriorated in 1951 when the USSR protested to Turkey against its proposed membership in NATO, with the veiled threat that the "responsibility for the results" of this policy rested entirely on the Turkish government.

The new Soviet regime has now implied that it is willing to enter into discussions with Turkey, declaring that "the Soviet government. . . has considered it possible to assure the security of the Soviet Union from the direction of the Straits under conditions equally acceptable to both." Whether any talks are actually held depends upon the reaction of the Turkish government, which may again insist on an international conference. According to Ambassador Bohlen, the Turkish Ambassador to Moscow said on 3 June that he regarded the note as a clear expression of current Soviet tactics designed to normalize relations with neighboring countries and to clear the decks for a return to diplomacy.

State Department review completed

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Moscow's past policy in the Balkans has been further outdated by extensive Western aid to Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey, the extension of NATO to the eastern Mediterranean, and Yugoslav participation in a Balkan Alliance. Thus, Moscow is confronted with the establishment of military bases on Orbit frontiers and current Yugoslav-Greek-Turkish staff talks which will consider the further integration of their military planning.

In view of this situation, the Soviet leaders appear to have decided that a new approach based ostensibly on "good neighborly relations" will best serve their aims. There are indications that the Soviet "declaration" to Turkey may be followed by other moves designed to improve relations with the countries of the Balkan Pact.

The first diplomatic contact between the USSR and Yugoslavia since 1948 occurred in an interview on 29 April between Foreign Minister Molotov and the Yugoslav Charge during which Molotov offered to include Yugoslavia among those countries desiring peace. On 18 May a highly experienced Balkans expert was appointed as the new Soviet Charge to Belgrade. While it may be expected that there will be an improvement in Soviet-Yugoslav relations, there appears little possibility that Yugoslavia will agree to an outright rapprochement with the Kremlin.

Although Moscow has apparently made no significant overture to Greece, the resumption of Soviet-Greek relations on the ambassadorial level has been rumored for several weeks. Soviet diplomats made unusually friendly gestures toward Greece following Stalin's death and the current trade talks between Greece and the USSR are, according to the Greek radio, proceeding "particularly" well.

The Soviet ambassador to Turkey and the Soviet Charge to Greece are now in the USSR and there is no indication that the newly appointed Charge to Yugoslavia has left Moscow. Although the return of Soviet diplomats to the USSR at this time of year is normal, it is possible that the three diplomats are being briefed on new tactics to be applied in their resident countries.

The Soviet offers to normalize relations or ease points of friction are intended to prevent the development and activation of western bases and the implementation of Balkan Pact planning. Kremlin maneuvers involving Yugoslavia specifically may also be designed to create distrust of Tito in the West and cause dissension among Yugoslav Communists.

Even if these offers are rejected, the Kremlin has again, at little cost to itself, demonstrated its willingness to improve relations and could claim another Western refusal to meet it halfway. In any event it will probably have achieved some reduction of tension in the Balkans.

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